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THE KARENS OF BURMA

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[146] Young people of both sexes are attractive and robust but hard work, undernourishment and, in the case of the women, constant child-bearing often make them appear old when they have only reached what should be the prime of life.

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Family life among the Karens is not unlike that of the ordinary European family. They do not have the patriarchal family system of the Chinese, and each married couple usually has its own house in which to live. Often the woman brings her young husband to live with her parents and he inherits their lands on their decease. Marriage in the early days was strictly within the tribe. Even marriage with those of other Karen tribes was looked down upon. Karen women usually bear as many as ten or more children, but often raise less than half of them, due to their lack of knowledge of sanitation. Karen fathers are usually fond of their children and take as good care of them as they know how. Their love is generally sentimental and children are allowed to rule the household. Old people usually receive good care for the Karens always reverence age.

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OCCUPATIONS

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In the early days the Karens were concerned with wresting a living for themselves from the ground where they lived. Almost without exception they were cultivators of the soil and raised rice, their principal food. They followed the two methods usually found in Burma, the mountain method in the hills and the paddy-field method on the plains.

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In the hills the wasteful way of cultivating rice was that of clearing a section, called in Burmese a *taung-ya*,

THE KAREN PEOPLE OF BURMA

682 of the latter to take active measures to avenge themselves. A dy-
628 ing father, whose condition was due to the assault of an enemy
or who had suffered other injury, would charge his sons to avenge
his wrong. The chief and the elders, recognizing the justice of the
cause, would further it and join in to punish the guilty inhabitant
of another village. As a precaution against a fatal accident or a
secret murder, persons were not allowed to have in their possession
dangerous poisons gathered from the jungle. Any one guilty of do-
ing so was acting unlawfully and was condemned by the elders to
be bound out in the hot sun for three days. He had also to destroy
his store of poisonous herbs and to promise never to commit the
offense again. After this he might be received again into the
village, or he might be sold into slavery. If he was believed guilty
of murder, his life was taken.

762 There appears to have been no law against suicide, and per-
haps for this reason, as well as others, the practice was once com-
mon among the people. Nevertheless, voluntary self-destruction is
regarded as an act of cowardice and, though not spoken of as dis-
pleasing to the spiritual powers, it prevented an honorable burial
from being given to the one guilty of it. Hanging has been the
usual method of committing the act among the Karens, while taking
poison has been the common means of suicide among the Burmese.
Incurable diseases, great disappointment, jealousy, and forcing a
young woman to marry some one she dislikes, have been the usual
causes of self-murder. Dr. Mason mentions a young man who was
able to recall the occurrence of twenty-five suicides in a group of
villages within a period of fifteen years. At the present time, prob-
ably on account of outside influences, such instances are rare indeed.

428 Inheritance regulations and customs are not definite or uniform
among the Karen; but usually property is divided among the chil-
dren, the eldest being given a little more than the others and the
youngest receiving a slightly smaller share. The widow has no legal
right to anything, although she generally succeeds in retaining the
use of more or less of the property during her lifetime. Should she
marry again, even this quasi-right terminates. The second husband
can not appropriate the property of the first, nor can his children
share it.

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and fundamental principles of human conduct embodied in the pre-